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Healthwatch- Heart and Stroke Centers

By Teresa Snow

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A bill being considered by state lawmakers would designate certain hospitals as stroke or heart attack centers. What began as House Bill 1790 is now known as a Senate Committee Substitute. It is bundled into a bill with two other ideas, one to create a statewide database for MRSA infections and another to require prescription drugs be sold for usual and customary prices even if your co-pay is higher.

Authors believe what they call the "Time Critical Diagnosis" plan could save lives in Missouri. "Missouri has a high rate of stroke and death from major heart attack and a more coordinated response will bring patients and right care at the right time," says MU Health Care cardiologist Dr. Dmitri Baklanov. The plan would dictate where a patient would be taken if the EKG indicated a STEMI heart attack. Paramedics could consult with doctors and chose the closest hospital where a patient can be stabilized, or proceed to an approved STEMI Heart Center. That facility would be able to open a blocked artery. At University Hospital they aim to do that in 60 to 90 minutes according to Cardiology Clinic Nurse Specialist Cindy Feutz.

Smaller hospitals like Callaway Community Hospital in Fulton do not have cath labs, but many others in Mid-Missouri have more than one. These hospitals expect to apply for designation as a STEMI Heart Center when guidelines are established. They include: MU Health Care, Boone Hospital, St. Mary's Health Center, Capital Region Medical Center, Audrain Medical Center and Lake Regional Medical Center.

When it comes to serving stroke patients the guidelines aren't as clear and only Boone and University hospitals believe they would qualify if a plan is established that requires a neurosurgeon in staff.

A task force of emergency professionals still needs to work out the details of how hospitals would apply for the designations, and the bill needs legislative approval. The deadline is Friday, the end of the legislative session.